DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 869 PS 021 239

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TITLE The Challenge for Child Care.
INSTITUTION Advanced Education Research Center, Tustin, CA.
PUB DATE [92]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Development; *Childhood Needs; *Cognitive Development; *Day Care; Early Childhood Education; *Educational Environment; Parent Role; Teacher Role; *Thinking Skills; *Values Education

ABSTRACT

For many years there has been concern over the growing need for adequate and available child care in the United States. Given this concern, the question arises as to what is meant by "adequate child care." It is not enough that child care be available; it must also be adequate with respect to fulfilling the developmental needs of the children it serves. Instruction in morality and values is not a prerogative of any form of the public education system in the United States as a matter of constitutional law, but it appears that some methodology which will provide preschool children with precisely this kind of experience is needed. Instruction in the area of values and judgment need not be situational or uniform, but rather needs to promote the acquisition of a set of basic cognitive skills which allow children opportunities and mechanisms for defining their own participation in society and making positive choices. The type of instruction required is instruction that: (1) encourages values that can be developed as a set of cognitive skills in an inclusive atmosphere which promotes self-expression and mutual respect; (2) provides guidance through directed activities in an environment which is sensitive to children's assessed developmental needs; and (3) allows decision making that is taught, acquired, and used without dependence upon outdated educational models, or predetermination of specific behavioral outcomes. (HOD)

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THE CHALLENGE FOR CHILD CARE

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Within today's social climate there is an ever increasing demand for affordable, available day care. The existence of a piecemeal system which covers the range from "I can watch them" to "Infant Universities" must be addressed in the interest of social stability and national status. With two thirds of our nation's infants and toddlers engaged in some form of child care other than that of the biological parents, the need for a research-based theoretical understanding of the territory upon which we are now treading must be considered. At very least academic professionals must examine the basic question:

> What experiences and opportunities must an infant and toddler have to provide the foundation which will ultimately allow the individual to maximize her/his potential?

A review of the primary national system dedicated to the existing national system for non-home human development: public education, fails to provide a base of information relevant to answering our question.

It is not commonly understood by many of the citizens of this country that the law of the land and the systems which we have constructed over the years to protect and enforce it are dedicated to the disposition, protection, and possession of

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property. Matters of law do not, of themselves, deal with concepts of virtue, justice, morality, or values, but are directed to quantitative determinations of monetary value, ownership, and precedent: a distinction which has grown out of a capitalist society and the constitutional separation of church and state. This last idea I am sure coming as a surprise to those who would develop political platforms intended to protect the "values" of the family through governmental mandate: a matter in which there is neither relevant qualification nor constitutional precedent.

This is not to minimize the importance or inherence of the role of values as a coagulant of society, especially with respect to rearing our children in matters of ethics and judgement. It simply raises some serious questions as to where and how that process is to occur within the framework of our current system. Former California governor Jerry Brown was once quoted as saying that we must return to a time when families resume the responsibility for raising children, that obligation need not be fulfilled by biological parents, but someone must become concerned with the task. It was an interesting observation, and an idea that has prompted conversation in my own household often over the last fifteen years. Unfortunately it is an insight which grow increasingly opaque when the reality of our societal child-rearing environment is examined.

Since 1976, the number of working women with children under the age of six has increased 80%. The number of these women with

children under the age of one has increased 65%. It has been predicted that by the year 1995, 15 million children in this country will be in preschool. The question of the emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development of these children begins to read like a contemporary riddle of the Sphinx:

How do you teach "family values" in an environment controlled by economic values?

How do you influence the development of children without undermining their individual cultural, moral, or ethical growth?

How do you teach decision-making skills without mandating which decisions must be made?

Women's groups, educational groups, political groups, civic groups for many years have declared the growing need for adequate and available child care in the United States. It is impossible to ignore the significance of this concern, but the question quickly arises as to what do we mean by "adequate child care". Half of all infants and toddlers in the United States are currently cared for by relatives in the home. Does traditional home-centered care still represent the best-case scenario when it comes to the welfare and development of our children, or do these 50% represent the largest underserved population in United States education? How do we as a society address the large number of five-year olds currently labeled as "not ready for kindergarten due to developmental delays"? Will returning them to the same environments address their needs?

Theoretical Perspectives on Child Care:

The term, "Human Ecological System", can be used as a generic designation to describe the interdependence of elements of the social environment which are created, defined, and stimulated through the interactions of human beings with other human beings. Models based upon this concept can be useful as a framework for analysis: a theoretical perspective from which to identify components of human interaction and social life for the purpose of isolating specific inputs and making determinations of need.

Research provides us with the components of the human ecosphere in the form of the work of such researchers as Bubolz, Eicler, and Sontag. This body of work suggests that human ecology is determined through the interaction of three distinct environmental components: the natural environment, the constructed environment, and the behavioral environment. Essentially what we are speaking of is a synergistic developmental system through which aspects of the natural environment are identified, those aspects are then challenged through human enterprise, giving rise to a new "natural" order which reconciles change with fundamental human beliefs, philosophies, and values.

A simplified example of the mechanisms of this system can be expressed by observing that the Creator made the natural world, human beings made cities, human beings modified their perception of their own natural environment to encompass cities and thus make them part of their natural world.

An idealized model based upon these assumptions regarding our relationship to child care is also fairly easy to construct: families make children, society develops systems for organizing the initial developmental education of those children, society redefines the concept of family to incorporate alternative child-rearing practices.

This view of child care as an ecological system is idealized in that it takes into account a perception of factors and events with respect to positive outcomes and predictable results. It does not, of course, take into account the realities of the system we have constructed for ourselves. In our race to make child care "available" we have developed a model through which families make children, child care supervises children, and no effort is made to consider the ultimate effect of substituting day-to-day contact with parents with day-to-day adherence to regulations and schedule without consideration for the gap in the children's developmental needs created through the perceived institutional need for consistency. Essentially, in terms of the ecological model we have constructed, there is no attempt to reassert the concept of natural environment upon the totally artificial environment created for the supervision of our children.

The distinction must be made between the availability of child care, and the appropriateness of service provided. It is not enough that child care be "available". It must also be "adequate" with respect to fulfilling the developmental needs of the

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children it serves, and it is through an examination of this aspect of child care delivery that we find the most glaring contradictions and our most brilliant opportunities.

We have already noted that instruction in the areas of morality and values is not a prerogative of any form of the public education system in the United States as a matter of constitutional law. But, what appears to be required is some methodology which will provide preschool-age children with precisely this kind of experience. In a very real sense, what we are attempting to replace is the input of family in matters of formative qualitative experience and replace it with a comparable educational experience which is a system of unrelated bites of information, both predictable and repeatable. The consideration addressed here is are we and should we be attempting to design developmental curriculum which teaches morality, ethics, and values as an aspect of child care curriculum?

It therefore becomes imperative that we come to some consensus as to what we mean by the concept, "Family Values". First, families today are clearly complex. For our purposes, when relating to infants and toddlers, family is whatever the caregiving unit defines itself as. The concept of values is equally complex. In a pluralistic society, the first question must be whose values? This is an interrogative which challenges the supremacy of a class, race, culture, gender, religion, or region. Values are closely guarded in our society as our independent, individual, personal right to define. So what is the

role of an institution or agency in "protecting values"? One view provided by Jean Piaget is to provide complete knowledge, within a non-judgmental environment, which encourages our youth to form and define their values from an enlightened perspective. To isolate those individuals who have moved through Piaget's three stages of moral development: rules, realism, and relativism, we find a profile of positive self-image, curiosity, and concerned confident risk-takers who take personal pride in their own success and the success of others.

What we are discussing does not fall into the category of that vague set of intangibles currently incorporated into the American political vocabulary, nor does it align itself with any particular religious, social, or economic dogma. Instruction in the area of values and judgement is not situational, nor is it uniform, but corresponds to the acquisition of a set of basic cognitive skills which allow children both the opportunity and the mechanism through which to define their own participation in the larger human ecosphere and make positive choices. A list of such skills would include:

non-verbal communication	curiosity	
positive self-image	unconditional acceptance	
self-awareness	interaction	cause and effect
spatial awareness	language skills	prioritization
synthesis	invention	reflection
pride in success	problem-solving	
pride in the success of others		

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The operative concept in this model is experiences and opportunity. What is required is a methodology through which to provide children with the opportunity to develop sound judgement in an atmosphere which emulates a child's natural environment, allows for choice, self-expression, and does not dictate specific results. There is a powerful and distinct difference between not throwing your coat on the floor because "We have a rule about throwing coats." and "You must determine how to best use your time, picking up your coat or at the activity table."

An additional feature which cannot be overlooked is the orientation toward service delivery itself. We again come back to the basic substitution which day-care centers are asked to make: to provide in the capacity of family. Is the instillation of values a process which is conducive to an artificial atmosphere characterized by uniformity and standardized results? Yet, is this not the very same environment which is employed in the public schools in order to create a climate of success. Clearly, a distinction must be made between the primary functions of our public schools and those educational opportunities which present themselves prior to that time.

The contrast between the ideal service environment of a pre-school and that of an elementary school can be directly compared by examining the bridge that exists between those two worlds: kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher has a job which is completely unique in terms of United States educational delivery. It is the primary function of kindergarten teachers to teach

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children how to and to like to go to school, while also making determinations as to whether there exists any physical, cognitive, or emotional developmental factors which may shape the future direction of a child's education. On the one hand, these teachers serve a function which has clear ramifications with respect to the organizational needs of the public school system. Children must be trained to respond to instructions to sit quietly, raise their hands, get into and walk in a line, respect the property of others, respect the space of others, demonstrate responsibility in task completion, and demonstrate socially appropriate behavior. Without these basic "School Skills", transition to a more academically oriented classroom environment becomes virtually impossible. On the other hand, these teachers are also expected to assess the status of a child's physical, cognitive, language, and emotional developmental levels, and to do so in a atmosphere which invites participation, cooperation, and success: a set of values and conditions which would not find themselves out of place in any well-considered pre-school environment.

The eventual orientation of our children to the mechanics of the public schools is inevitable. The historic roots of education in the United States, and the European systems which served as its model, have left us with a definition of the educational experience which mandates specific types of behavior for success. The restructuring of that system is considered by many to be a necessity if our nation is to survive. In an attempt to

universalize the educational process through systematic conformity, we are presented with a hopelessly fragmented set of problems including cultural, gender, and class bias, overtaxed resources, and an absence of optimism. What is equally clear is that we do not need to repeat those mistakes with respect to the development of a national child care system.

The success of our child care program will require more than brightly colored classrooms, adequate staff, and nutritional snacks. What we are presented with is an opportunity to develop "natural" behavioral models for our children which invite exploration of their environment and provide the tools to maximize the value of that experience. In light of the possibilities, we have the knowledge and skills to answer the Sphinx:

> Values can be encouraged and developed as a set of cognitive skills in an inclusive atmosphere which promotes self-expression and mutual respect.
>
> Guidance can be directed activities in an environment which is sensitive to children's assessed developmental needs.
>
> Decision-making can be taught, acquired, and utilized without dependence upon outdated educational models, or predetermination of specific behavioral outcomes.

Our society is standing at a crossroad which intersects public

education and a national child-care program. We are faced with structuring a public education system for a pluralistic society for the first time in our history, and to design our first national child-care system. Research, scholarship, discussion, and debate not withstanding, what we are considering is the future of our children. The lesson of past misconceptions concerning how our children learn must be recognized, the potentials of our present knowledge must be employed, and in the best meaning of the term, affirmation of values must be considered for the future of our young and those yet unborn.

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